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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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India, China to discuss resumption of flights

Foreign Secy Misri is in Beijing for talks with Chinese officials

BEIJING, 26 JAN

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, who arrived in Beijing on Sunday for a two-day visit, will discuss the resumption of direct flights between India and China, alongside China's request for India to facilitate the issuance of visas to Chinese citizens. Misri's visit follows a series of high-profile Indian visits to China in recent months and marks the second such visit in less than six weeks.

Misri, also a former Ambassador to China, is in Beijing from 26 to 27 January for a Foreign Secretary-Vice Minister meeting between India and China. The visit, coinciding with Republic Day and ahead of China's Spring Festival, follows agreements between leaders of both countries to advance bilateral ties across political, economic, and people-to-people domains.

Vikram Misri, also a former Ambassador to China, is in Beijing from 26 to 27 January **PHOTO: PTI**

China welcomed Misri's visit, emphasising that it came after several interactions between top leaders and officials. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning highlighted President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi's discussions in October on strengthening relations, which have since seen positive developments. Notably, the two countries resumed talks on boundary issues, including the 23rd meeting between Special Representatives (SRs) last month.

In addition to discussions on the border situation, which includes de-escalation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, the talks are expected to focus on resuming the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and other areas of cooperation. The SR mechanism revival and other dialogues were agreed upon during the Modi-Xi meeting in Kazan in October, following a disengagement pact for Depsang and Demchok. India has emphasized that ties with China cannot normalise without peace in the border areas. —*PTI*

UCC to be implemented in Uttarakhand today

DEHRADUN, 26 JAN

Uniform Civil Code will be implemented in Uttarakhand on Monday, making it the first state in independent India to put into effect such a law, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said. The law's implementation was a major commitment of BJP in the run-up to the 2022 Assembly polls, which saw the party storm to power for a second consecutive term, something never done by any other party in the state since its creation in 2000. Several BJP-ruled states, including Assam, have already expressed their desire to adopt Uttarakhand's UCC as a model. The Uniform Civil Code Act of Uttarakhand will govern and regulate the laws relating to marriage and divorce, succession, live-in relationships and related matters. It sets equal marriageable age for men and women, grounds of divorce and procedures across all religions, and bans polygamy and 'halala'.— *PTI*

Sri Lanka Navy arrests 34 Indian fishermen

COLOMBO, 26 JAN

Sri Lankan Navy arrested at least 34 Indian fishermen and seized three trawlers for illegal fishing in two separate incidents, the authorities said on Sunday. The fishermen have been arrested for illegal fishing in two separate incidents on 25 and 26 January, the Navy said. Both arrests came off the coast of the northeastern Mannar district in the Navy's continued regular patrols in the Sri Lankan waters to curb illegal fishing, the Navy said. The Indian High Commission here earlier this week said some 41 Indian fishermen who had been similarly arrested previously for poaching in Sri Lankan waters were repatriated. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

ISRO says GSLV-F15 integration done, ready for launch

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

ISRO on Sunday said integration of its rocket GSLV-F15 with satellite NVS-02 is complete. The GSLV-F15 rocket with Indigenous cryogenic stage is ready to be launched on 29 January, with the satellite NVS-02 on board, the space agency said. This will be the 100th mission from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, GSLV-F15 will place the NVS-02 satellite into a Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit and the launch will take place from the Second Launch Pad of Satish Dhawan Space Centre, said ISRO. NVS-01, the first of the second-generation satellites, was launched on board GSLV-F12 on May 29, 2023. NVS-02, the second satellite in the NVS series, is configured with navigation payload in L1, L5 and S bands in addition to ranging payload in C-band like its predecessor-NVS-01, ISRO said. —*PTI*

REPUBLIC DAY IN CITY

Bengaluru's Vidhana and Vikasa Soudha illuminated on Republic Day on Sunday. Governor Thawarchand Gehlot with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at the Manekshaw Parade Grounds **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD** >>>More on Pages 2 & 4

Sanatan Dharma is national religion: Yogi

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said that Sanatan Dharma is the national religion of India.

In an interview to NDTV, Yogi said that the Mahakumbh -- the massive religious event at Prayagraj-- is not meant for any single caste or religion

"Sanatan Dharma is the national religion of India. It is the religion of humanity. The process of worship can be different. But religion is one and that religion is Sanatan Dharma. Kumbh is the representative of that Sanatan Dharma," he said.

On Saturday, the Chief Minister had made a similar stand. Addressing an event at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, he said India would remain strong if Sanatana Dharma is strong. He warned that if the country faced a crisis, Sanatana Dharma would be in danger and no sect or caste would remain safe. —*Agencies*

- "Sanatan Dharma is the national religion of India. It is the religion of humanity. The process of worship can be different. But religion is one and that religion is Sanatan Dharma. Kumbh is the representative of that Sanatan Dharma," he said.

INDONESIA PREZ AT R-DAY PARADE

President Droupadi Murmu with her Indonesian counterpart Prabowo Subianto and Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrive for the 76th Republic Day parade at the Kartavya Path in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

India, Indonesia want code of conduct in South China Sea

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

India and Indonesia have pitched for a "full and effective" code of conduct in the South China Sea (SCS) in accordance with the relevant international laws amid China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the region.

Meanwhile, Subianto watched India's 76th Republic-Day celebrations at Kartavya Path on Sunday with President Droupadi Murmu , joining a select group of global leaders to grace the nation's biggest ceremonial event.

The situation in the South China Sea figured in wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto on Saturday, a joint statement said.

In their meeting, the two sides agreed to position a liaison officer from Indonesia at India's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR).

The Indian Navy established the IFC-IOR in Gurugram in 2018 to keep track of shipping traffic as well as other critical developments in the region under a collaborative framework with like-minded countries.

Modi and Subianto, while strongly condemning terrorism in all its forms, vowed to enhance India-Indonesia anti-terror cooperation and called for concerted global efforts to combat the menace without any "double standards".

Both leaders called upon all countries to take concerted action against UN-proscribed terrorist organisations and their affiliates, the statement said. In their talks, Modi and Subianto also explored ways to boost India–Indonesia economic ties and emphasised the importance of expeditious implementation of an MoU inked by the two sides last year. —*PTI*

Disapproving marriage not abetment of suicide: SC

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

The Supreme Court has said expressing disapproval for marriage does not amount to abetment of suicide under section 306 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma made the observation while quashing a chargesheet against a woman who was accused of abetting the suicide of another woman who was allegedly in love with her son.

The allegations were based on disputes between the deceased and the appellant's son, who had refused to marry her. The appellant was accused of opposing the marriage and making disparaging remarks against the deceased. "We find that the acts of the appellant are too remote and indirect to constitute the offence under section 306, IPC. There is no allegation against the appellant of a nature that the deceased was left with no alternative but to commit the unfortunate act of suicide," the bench said.

PHOTO: PTI

"In fact, it was the deceased's family that was unhappy with the relationship. Even if the appellant expressed her disapproval towards the marriage of Babu Das and the deceased, it does not rise to the level of direct or indirect instigation of abetting suicide. —*PTI*

2ND TITLE IN A ROW

Sinner beats Zverev, keeps Aus Open title

MELBOURNE, 26 JAN

There is all sorts of ways beyond merely the score to measure just how dominant Jannik Sinner was while outplaying and frustrating Alexander Zverev during the 6–3, 7–6 (4), 6–3 victory on Sunday that earned the 23-year-old Italian a second consecutive Australian Open championship.

The zero break points Sinner faced. Or the 10 he accumulated. The 27–13 advantage in points that lasted at least nine strokes. Or the way Sinner accumulated more winners, 32 to 25, and fewer unforced errors, 27 to 45. The way Sinner won 10 of 13 points that ended with him at the net. Or the way he only let Zverev go 14 of 27 in that category, frequently zipping passing shots out of reach.

Jannik Sinner of Italy holds the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup aloft after defeating Alexander Zverev of Germany in the men's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia **PHOTO: PTI**

Zverev told Sinner during the on-court trophy ceremony: "You're the best player in the world, by far. I was hoping that I could be more of a competitor today, but you're just too good."

That's coming from world No. 2 behind Sinner, who has held the No. 1 spot since last June and is not showing any signs of relinquishing it. This was the first Australian Open final between the men at No. 1 and No. 2 since 2019, when No. 1 Novak Djokovic defeated No. 2 Rafael Nadal – also in straight sets.

"It's amazing," Sinner said, "to achieve these things."

That includes being the youngest man to leave Melbourne Park with the trophy two years in a row since Jim Courier in 1992–93 and the first man since Nadal at the French Open in 2005 and 2006 to follow up his first Grand Slam title by repeating as the champion at the same tournament a year later. —*PTI*

BJP swaying Delhi voters with 2020 riots film: Cong

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Congress on Sunday accused BJP of trying to create division in society and influence voters by promoting a film based on "distorted events" ahead of the Assembly election in Delhi.

Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi also urged the Election Commission (EC) to take immediate action to stop the 2 February release of the film, '2020 Delhi'.

He said the EC should follow the precedence set during the 2019 general elections when it stalled the release of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's biopic.

The trailer of '2020 Delhi', set against the backdrop of the 2020 northeast Delhi riots, was released earlier this week.

Singhvi said while the Congress celebrated Republic Day with vigour, the BJP continued to spread its agenda with the same enthusiasm -- the only difference being that its agenda was negative.

PHOTO: PTI

The Congress leader also said Modi's proposed visit to the Maha Kumbh on the day of Delhi's election was not a coincidence.

Alleging that the BJP had repeatedly made religious gestures to coincide with elections, Singhvi quoted fictional spy James Bond to attack the saffron party. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Dinesh Gundu Rao condemns attack on M'luru salon

MANGALURU, 26 JAN

Karnataka Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Sunday condemned the recent attack on a unisex salon here, saying that such incidents tarnish the reputation of both the district and the City. Rao, who holds the Health and Family Welfare portfolio and is in charge of Dakshina Kannada district, referred to the attack carried out by the fringe group Ram Sene. The group was reportedly upset over alleged immoral activities at the salon. Speaking to reporters after hoisting the national flag on the 76th Republic Day in Mangaluru, Gundu Rao said, "We don't understand why these fringe groups target businesses or what their motives are." He underscored that anyone with a grievance should approach the police and lodge a complaint. *—PTI*

Vatal Nagaraj protests against microfinance firms

MYSURU, 26 JAN

Kannada activist and former MLA Vatal Nagaraj on Sunday held a protest at Jayachamarajendra Circle in Mysuru, urging the state government to initiate action against microfinance agencies. Nagaraj appealed to the government to direct such agencies to stop harassing people. He said more than 10 persons in the state have taken their own lives, unable bear mental torture by such agencies, in the recent days. Thousands of people have fled their villages for being unable to repay the loans taken from them, Nagaraj said. The former MLA accused the agencies of collecting hefty interests and violating RBI guidelines. He urged the government to direct nationalised banks to provide loans between Rs 5000 and Rs 5 lakh at low interest rates. *—Salar News*

Stray dogs kill 6-yr-old spotted deer in Mysuru

MYSURU, 26 JAN

A pack of stray dogs mauled to death a six-year-old spotted deer at Chikkahejjur village in Veerana Hosahalli range of Nagarahole tiger reserve in Hansur taluk on Saturday, officials said. Forest Officer Devaraj and a few officials visited the spot and conducted preliminary investigations, they said. The residents of Chikkajajur urged the forest department and local authorities to take steps to curb the stray dog menace in their village. This is the sixth such incident in the village in the past one year, yet the authorities have not taken any action, they said. Because of its proximity to the forest, a large number of spotted deer and other wild animals stray into the village for water and food, they said. *—Salar News*

Temporary road closures for metro work on 27 & 28 Jan

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

The Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has announced temporary traffic restrictions to facilitate infrastructure development in parts of the City. As per the notification issued, the BMRCL will install a 65-metre composite girder over the Salem railway crossing near Rainbow Hospital Junction, Doddanekkundi. The work is expected to impact traffic in the Mahadevapura and HAL traffic police station limits on 27 and 28 January, from 9pm to 6am. In coordination with the Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP), the BMRCL has shared the following advisory and has requested the public to extend their cooperation for the timely completion of this critical metro infrastructure project. *—Salar News*

State upholds federalism, unity: Guv

Gehlot says Karnataka committed to union principles, contributing to national development

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

- Governor Ashok Gehlot also underlined that the Constitution has recognised and respected the administrative authority of the States

Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot on Sunday underlined the need to repose faith in the Constitution as well as cooperative federalism.

In his Republic Day speech replete with the mention of the Indian constitution and the need to protect it, Gehlot said the Karnataka government raised its voice whenever the tenets of federalism as enshrined in the constitution were compromised.

Noting that the Constitution in its very first article declares India to be a union of states, Gehlot said it divides the sovereign power between the federation or union and states.

"The Government of Karnataka is fully committed to uphold the practices of the principles of union and has accordingly contributed to the development of the country as per the ideals of the Constitution," the Governor said in his address from the Sam Manekshaw Parade Ground.

"Karnataka has raised its voice whenever the tenets of federalism have been compromised. This Republic Day, let us all reiterate our faith in the Constitution as well as cooperative federalism," he added.

Gehlot also underlined that the Constitution has recognised and respected the administrative authority of the States, thereby respecting the diversity of the country to uphold the unity and integrity of the country while giving more power to the Union Government.

Governor also explained the five guarantees to achieve the ideals of social and economic justice laid down in the constitution, which are 'Shakti', 'Anna Bhagya', 'Gruha Jyoti', 'Gruha Lakshmi' and 'Yuva Nidhi'. *—PTI*

Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot at the Republic Day celebration held at Manekshaw Parade Grounds, Bengaluru. Governor took the guard of honour from the march past team during the parade **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Owe Padma Bhushan to people: Anant Nag

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

Seasoned Kannada actor Anant Nag on Sunday said he owes the people of Karnataka for the Padma Bhushan Award.

Nag, whose illustrious career spans over five decades, has been nominated for the Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civilian honour.

"I owe this award to the people of Karnataka and Kannadigas," he told PTI Videos, dedicating the prestigious recognition to the public that has supported him throughout his career in cinema and small screen.

Anant Nag's artistic journey has left an indelible mark on the film industry, and his fans believe that this honour was long overdue. He acted in over 300 films across different languages and genres. *—PTI*

State's tableau depicts temples of Lakkundi

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

- The front part of the tableau that rolled down Kartavya Path had the Brahma statue from the Brahma Jinalaya temple, oldest Jain shrine in Lakkundi dedicated to Lord Mahaveera

Karnataka's tableau in the 76th Republic-Day parade here on Sunday depicted the exquisite and artistic temples of the historic city of Lakkundi.

Located in Gadag district of Karnataka, about 70 km from Hubballi, Lakkundi is called the "Cradle of Stone Craft" for its stunning stone architecture.

The front part of the tableau that rolled down Kartavya Path had the Brahma statue from the Brahma Jinalaya temple, the oldest Jain shrine in Lakkundi dedicated to Lord Mahaveera.

It was followed by the open-pillared mantapa of the Brahma Jinalaya temple.

The main section of the tableau had on display the grand and ornate Kashi Vishweshwara temple and Nanneshwara temple dedicated to Lord Shiva.

The temples of Lakkundi reflect the rich cultural heritage of Karnataka and celebrate all faiths and religions. The southern state has always been a"SarvaJanangdaShaanthiya Thota", a quintessential garden of peace.

Lakkundi is home to beautiful temples, stepwells and inscriptions from the Chalukya dynasty.

Besides being a cultural powerhouse, Lakkundi was a large thriving city and a commercial hub between the 10th and 12th century AD.

The city was ruled by several dynasties but the most important of them were the Chalukyas.

Lakkundi is a paradise for antiquarians and architecture enthusiasts. It has 50 temples, most of which are dedicated to Lord Shiva, 101 stepwells and 29 inscriptions. *—PTI*

Mahadevappa hails Kho Kho team on R-Day

MYSURU, 26 JAN

Social Welfare and District In-charge minister Dr HC Mahadevappa on Sunday hailed the Kho Kho World Cup team, highlighting the contributions of player Chaitra from Kurbur from the district, for making the country proud.

Mahadevappa was speaking after receiving the guard-of-honour at the 76th Republic Day celebrations held on TorchLight Parade Grounds at Bannimantap in Mysuru.

Total 27 teams took part in the Republic Day parade.

The minister also remembered the contributions of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr BR Ambedkar, Sardar Vallabh Bai Patel and other freedom fighters in making the nation the strong force it is today by freeing it from colonial rule, uniting over 500 and giving it a Constitution of its own.

Mahadevappa also highlighted the achievements of the state government and how its guarantee schemes benefited the people. *—Salar News*

AICC President Mallikarjuna Kharge joins KPCC President DK Shivakumar and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in celebrating Republic Day at the party office in Bengaluru, on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

'BJP DWELLERS OF HELL, WHO DID NOTHING FOR INDEPENDENCE'

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday called the BJP leaders as the "dwellers of hell" who did nothing for the independence or to uplift the economy and the society.

Addressing Congress workers after unfurling the Indian tricolour at the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee office, Kharge said Congress made India as an independent country and is striving for its unity.

In a scathing attack on the Centre, especially Union Home Minister Amit Shah for his alleged insulting remarks on the architect of Indian constitution BR Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha recently, Kharge said the BJP government was dumping all the constitutional values.

Underlining the significance of the 75th Republic Day, he said it was important for the Indians to function in accordance with the constitution but due to certain reasons, the BJP led Central government is dumping all the constitutional values.

According to Kharge, Congress led UPA had made the country fourth major economy while the BJP brought it down to the fifth position.

The Congress president said he was going to Indore on Monday where the party has organised 'Gandhi Bharat' programme. *—PTI*

Punjab's Gatka Team showcases a vibrant performance during the Republic Day celebration; Students showcase vibrant cultural performances at Manekshaw Parade Grounds in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD**

SWR Mysuru surpasses Rs 1,000 crore revenue

MYSURU, 26 JAN

South Western Railway's (SWR) Mysuru division has surpassed a significant milestone, crossing Rs 1,000 crore in total revenue for the current year. In her address during the 76th Republic Day celebrations at the Railway Sports Ground in Yadavagiri, Mysuru, Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Shilpi Agarwal revealed that the division's goods revenue stood at Rs 649.44 crore, while passenger revenue reached Rs 315.51 crore.

Agarwal attributed the division's financial success to strong performance in multiple areas, including financial growth, safety measures, infrastructure improvements, and enhanced passenger services. She highlighted a notable increase in freight operations, with the transportation of 73 NMG rakes of automobiles and a rise in food grain transportation.

The division also saw a surge in passenger traffic, transporting 24.95 million passengers and maintaining an impressive 94 per cent punctuality rate for mail and express trains. To meet the increased demand during peak seasons, special trains were introduced, including those to Prayagraj during Kumbh.

Railway Protection Force (RPF) actively ensured passenger security, and a special campaign, "Operation NightHawk," was launched. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Actor Shivarajkumar returns to hero's welcome

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

Prominent Kannada film actor Shivarajkumar on Sunday expressed his heartfelt gratitude to his fans for their prayers and support during his critical cancer surgery in the United States.

The 62-year-old actor thanked his well-wishers following his successful operation and recovery.

"There was a positive atmosphere in the hospital that gave me strength and hope for my health. With your prayers and good wishes, I recovered quickly. I am grateful for all your blessings and support," he told reporters.

Shivarajkumar returned to the State capital to a grand reception at Kempegowda International Airport, and fans greeted him with a large garland made of flowers and fruits, lifted by a crane.

They celebrated his safe return by bursting crackers, pouring milk on his cut-outs, and dancing in joy. The star, son of legendary Kannada actor Rajkumar, had been diagnosed with cancerous in his bladder. *—PTI*

200+ DONATIONS LIKELY

BRIMS faces shortage of cadavers for MBBS students' studies

BIDAR, 26 JAN

The Bidar Institute of Medical Sciences (BRIMS) is struggling with a significant shortage of cadavers, affecting the quality of education for its MBBS students. According to Indian Medical Council (IMC) regulations, there should be at least one cadaver for every 10 MBBS students to ensure proper study and research. With 150 MBBS students admitted each year at BRIMS, the institute should have at least 15 cadavers available. However, it currently has only six, causing concern among students and faculty.

Students have expressed that the lack of sufficient cadavers is hindering their ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of human anatomy.

Social activist Gurudas Amadalapada commented, "If more effort is put in, the necessary cadavers can be acquired."

PHOTO: X

In an effort to address the issue, two bodies were donated to BRIMS by Dr Ramanna's Charitable Trust of Bailahongala, Belgaum district, on November 26, 2024. This followed a similar donation of two bodies by the trust in 2023. Of the seven cadavers currently available at BRIMS, four were donated by the trust, while arrangements for the remaining three have been made.

"More than 200 people have registered for body donation at BRIMS, but the number of donors has significantly decreased since Covid-19 pandemic", Dr Sandeep Deshmukh head of the anatomy department BRIMS said.*—Salar News*

ONE DETAINED IN B'DESHI WOMAN'S CASE

BENGALURU, 26 JAN

The investigation into the sexual assault and murder of a Bangladeshi woman near

Kalkere in Ramamurthy Nagar has gained momentum, with police detaining a suspect spotted near the crime scene on Sunday.

The 28-year-old woman, employed as a domestic help at an apartment, was found murdered on Friday morning, her body bearing signs of sexual violence and her head crushed by a heavy stone to obscure her identity.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Bengaluru East, D Devaraj, said that Ramamurthy Nagar police had made significant progress in the case. "We have gathered several clues regarding suspects," he stated. *—Salar News*

4 militants held in separate ops in Manipur

Imphal, 26 Jan

Four militants were arrested in separate operations in Manipur's Imphal West and Churachandpur districts, police said on Sunday. Two active members of the proscribed PREPAK (Progressive) were arrested from Langol Type II in Imphal West district on Saturday. They were identified as Sairem Rishikumar Singh, 24, and Longjam Nganthoiba Meitei alias Lamngakpa, 22. They were allegedly involved in extortions in Imphal and Thoubal, police said. Six mobile phones, two .32 pistols, five .32 live rounds, five extortion letters, and a four-wheeler were seized from their possession. Two cadres of the proscribed UKRA (SoO group) were arrested from Maunjang village. *—PTI*

BJD dissolves frontal body ahead of elections

BHUBANESWAR, 26 JAN

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Sunday dissolved all its state level frontal organisations ahead of the organisational election of the party, as per an official order of BJD chief Naveen Patnaik. The frontal organisations that have been dissolved are Biju Mahila Janata Dal, Biju Yuva Janata Dal, Biju Chhatra Janata Dal, Biju Shramika Samukhya, Legal Cell, Apravasi Cell. BJD Spokesperson Lenin Mohanty said that the organisational election will be held within two months and after that new committees will be formed. BJD, which has ruled Odisha since 1997, lost to the BJP, breaking the 24-year-old reign of Naveen Patnaik as the Chief Minister. The BJD won 51 out of 147 seats, while the BJP secured a majority by winning 78 seats. *—ANI*

Dibrugarh to be Assam's second capital: Himanta

DIBRUGARH, 26 JAN

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said the district headquarters of Dibrugarh will be developed as the second capital of the state within the next three years. Unfurling the national flag here on the occasion of Republic Day, Sarma said the government will construct a permanent building of the assembly in this city on the southern bank of Brahmaputra in Upper Assam. "Today is an important day in Dibrugarh's journey to become the second capital of Assam. For the first time, state celebrations are taking place in this historical city," he said. From 2027, one session of Assam assembly will take place in Dibrugarh every year, the CM announced. Sarma said India has a Constitution with the ethos of brotherhood and compassion, rising above narrow thinking. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

'₹21K cr allocated to women under Ladki scheme'

MUMBAI, 26 JAN

Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan on Sunday said 2.46 crore women have been provided collective assistance of Rs 21,000 crore under the government's Ladki Bahin scheme. Addressing the Republic Day function at the Shivaji Park in Mumbai, the governor also said Maharashtra stands first in the country in attracting the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). "I appeal to all to resolve to form a new and strong Maharashtra. We must all work together to make our dream of one trillion-dollar economy, a reality," he said. Under the state government's flagship Ladki Bahin scheme, touted to have played a major role in the BJP-led Mahayuti's win the assembly polls last year, the eligible women are provided Rs 1,500 per month. *—PTI*

BJP: Kejri misleading voters with hoax calls

He accused AAP of distributing ₹500 in slums

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

The BJP on Sunday accused AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal of orchestrating hoax calls to mislead voters across Delhi, claiming that their votes were "cut" by the BJP.

BJP MP Parvesh Verma on Sunday held a press conference, wherein he played an audio recording of one such call, in which a person says, "Your vote has been cut by the BJP. AAP will ensure you get your vote back," and urged the receiver to support the Aam Aadmi Party.

"Hoax calls are being made to the public, saying that BJP will end all AAP schemes. This is a blatant lie," he said.

He also wondered how "confidential voter data" was accessed by the party. "Besides the Election Commission of India, nobody else has this data. How did Kejriwal get the voters' contact list? This must be investigated," Verma said.

The BJP's New Delhi candidate for the Assembly election also accused the AAP of distributing Rs 500 notes wrapped in calendars in the slum areas. He claimed three people were arrested in this connection.

MP Parvesh Verma **PHOTO: PTI**

- Verma said he has filed a complaint with the Election Commission and his party demands an investigation into the matter

Verma said he has filed a complaint with the Election Commission and his party demands an investigation into the matter. BJP leader and Sudhanshu Trivedi, who was also present at the press conference, welcomed the US Supreme Court's decision to extradite to India Tahawwur Rana, an accused in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. "Under Modi's leadership, the government remains committed to fighting terrorism. The decision to hand over Tahawwur Rana to India is a welcome one for all of us," Trivedi said. Trivedi accused the AAP and Congress of supporting activities that indirectly shield terrorism. "Atishi's parents were among those seeking a (forgiveness ritual) for Afzal Guru," he alleged, referring to the mastermind of the 2001 Parliament attack. *—PTI*

Kejri questions SRPF deployment in Delhi

The companies reached Delhi on EC orders

AHMEDABAD, 26 JAN

Aam Aadmi Party's national convener Arvind Kejriwal has questioned the deployment of eight companies of the State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) from Gujarat for the upcoming Delhi assembly elections.

The SRPF companies reached Delhi on 13 January as on order of the Election Commission (EC), Commandant SRPF, Bhachau, Tejas Patel said on Saturday.

Kejriwal, in a post on X on Saturday, shared a circular issued by the office of the Additional Director General of Police (DGP), Armed Unit, regarding deployment of SRPF for Delhi election.

"Read this order of Gujarat Police. Election Commission has removed Punjab Police from Delhi and deployed Gujarat Police. What is going on?" the former Delhi chief minister asked.

Kejriwal's post came a day after the Punjab Police personnel deployed for his personal security were withdrawn, which he claimed was "pure politics".

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

There should not be any politics at least over personal safety and security, he added.

Kejriwal also said the assembly election was not just a contest for the national capital but the entire country.

"This election is about deciding how taxpayers' money should be spent. One ideology, represented by the BJP, uses public funds to waive loans worth thousands of crores for its close associates. The other, our AAP model, focuses on providing free electricity, education, health care and transport to benefit the common man," Kejriwal said at a press conference on Sunday.

Criticising the BJP-led Centre, the former Delhi chief minister alleged that it had waived debts amounting to Rs 10 lakh crore of 400-500 industrialists during the past five years.

"The BJP model gives people's money to its friends as loans and then writes off those loans in two to three years. In contrast, the AAP model provides direct benefits to the public, including welfare schemes worth nearly Rs 25,000 per month for each household in Delhi," he said. *—PTI*

RG Kar victim's parents doing politics: Minister

KOLKATA, 26 JAN

West Bengal Municipal Affairs and Urban Development Minister Firhad Hakim on Sunday said the parents of the RG Kar hospital victim are doing politics by maligning Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

A day earlier, Trinamool Congress leader Kunal Ghosh alleged that the parents of the RG Kar hospital victim are being "used" by the forces which want to "defame, malign and plot conspiracy against the Mamata Banerjee government". Echoing Ghosh, Hakim said Banerjee has been elected by popular mandate and not by "those who are using the grief-stricken parents as puppets.

Replying to a question by reporters on the sidelines of a Republic Day function in the city, Hakim said, "I share the extreme pain and anguish of the parents. I share their reservations about the way the CBI investigated the case after taking it over from Kolkata Police.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

"But when they target the CM and malign her without any reason, I have to say they are exceeding the brief. They are not supposed to speak on the governance of the CM who came to power by popular mandate and not by the wish of forces who are using the parents as puppets for their agenda," the minister said.

He alleged the parents are doing politics over the issue and playing in the hands of vested interests. "They should not mouth scripted lines like parrots," he said. *—PTI*

AKHILESH TAKES HOLY DIP

Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav takes a holy dip at Sangam during Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Sunday. Akhilesh said it was not a place for negative politics even as he criticised the BJP government's management of the Maha Kumbh and said it should not be turned into a sports event **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP SWEEPS U'KHAND LOCAL BODY POLLS

DEHRADUN, 26 JAN

The BJP on Sunday swept the urban local body elections in Uttarakhand, winning 10 out of 11 mayoral seats to emerge as the dominant party in the municipal councils and nagar panchayats.

While the BJP won 10 mayoral seats, an Independent candidate bagged the remaining seat, State Election Commissioner Sushil Kumar said.

However, the counting which began on Saturday is still underway and the results of all the 100 urban local bodies which went to the polls on 23 January are likely to be out by late afternoon. Meanwhile, BJP announced its candidates for all the 10 mayoral posts in Chhattisgarh which will be held along with the other urban body polls next month. *—PTI*

Revanth urges withdrawal of draft UGC guidelines

HYDERABAD, 26 JAN

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Sunday said he would see the draft UGC guidelines as an "attack on Constitution" and demanded that the Centre withdraw them.

Reddy also expressed strong dissatisfaction over the Centre allegedly ignoring the state government's recommendations in selection of Padma awards.

Though Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution, had outlined in Constitution the subjects in state, Central and concurrent lists, the Centre was now trying to take away the existence of universities from the state in the name of amendments, he alleged.

The Centre is proposing to appoint vice chancellors of Telangana universities from Delhi but how would those in Delhi be aware of the realities in the state, he said.

There is a "big cultural attack and conspiracy" behind seeking to have control on universities in the state. *—PTI*

Farmers take out tractor parade in Punjab

HOSHIARPUR/ CHANDIGARH, 26 JAN

Farmers' organisations under the banner of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Sunday took out "tractor parades" at multiple locations across Punjab in support of their demands.

Their demands include legal guarantee on minimum support price (MSP) as suggested by the Swaminathan committee, a comprehensive loan waiver scheme for farmers and farm workers, no privatisation of electricity, withdrawal of the National Policy Framework on Agriculture Marketing and debt waiver.

Hundreds of farmers took part in each procession. At some places, black flags were prominently displayed on the tractors.

The SKM had called upon farmers to conduct tractor or motorcycle parades on 26 January at the district or sub-divisional levels across the country.

Farmers take part in a tractor march on the Republic Day, in Amritsar, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

"In order to achieve all the pending demands, a massive, determined and countrywide struggle larger than the historic farmers' struggle at the Delhi Borders of 2020–21 in participation, intensity and pan-India form have to be planned," the farmers' body said in a recent statement.

On the other hand, the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) along with the SKM (Non-Political), which is spearheading the ongoing farmers' protest at Khanauri and Shambhu border points for the past 11 months, also held protests at several places in the state. As part of their protest to coincide with the Republic Day celebrations, they parked tractors outside big shopping malls and silos.KMM leaders said the protest was to show solidarity with small traders and businessmen who are allegedly being marginalised by big corporate entities and with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal. *—PTI*

TACKLE SHRINKING WORKFORCE

Andhra set to have policy for demographic management: Guv

AMARAVATI, 26 JAN

Andhra Pradesh will soon come out with a policy on demographic management to address the cascading effects of shrinking workforce, aging population and changing family dynamics, Governor S Abdul Nazeer said on Sunday.

After unfurling the national flag on the occasion of the Republic Day at Vijayawada, Nazeer said the state is undergoing significant demographic transitions, which include a steep decline in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), a rapidly aging population, and the erosion of traditional joint family systems, each with far-reaching implications.

"The government is committed to handle the cascading effects of a shrinking workforce, aging population, and changing family dynamics by launching a policy on 'demographic management' to address the cascading effects of shrinking workforce, aging population, and changing family dynamics," the governor said. Several countries are facing a deleterious impact of declining TFR, and the state government is committed to overcome this crisis, by engaging larger public discourse on its impact, Nazeer said.

Andhra Governor Abdul Nazeer said that the proposed multifaceted roadmap will encompass investments in healthcare infrastructure **PHOTO: X**

This proposed multifaceted roadmap will encompass investments in healthcare infrastructure, development of robust and inclusive social security schemes, and initiatives aimed at fostering community-based support systems, Nazeer said. *—PTI*

'Respect differences, live in harmony'

MUMBAI, 26 JAN

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said differences should be respected and cohesion is the key to living in harmony.

No one should be suppressed and everyone should get an opportunity to grow, he asserted while speaking after unfurling the national flag at the Republic Day celebration at a college in Bhiwandi town of Maharashtra's Thane district.

Along with celebration, Republic Day is an occasion to "remember our responsibilities towards the nation," he said.

Addressing the issue of diversity, Bhagwat said differences should be respected and that "cohesion is the key to living in harmony".

"Clashes are happening outside Bharat due to diversity. We see diversity as a natural part of life. You can have your own specialities, but you must be good to each other. If you want to live, it should be a cohesive living. You cannot be happy if your family is unhappy. Similarly, a family cannot be happy if the town is facing trouble," he said.

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat appealed to the youngsters to achieve greatness and use their success for the betterment of the country **PHOTO: PTI**

Bhagwat appealed to the younger generation to achieve greatness and use their success for the betterment of the country.

Bhagwat said the ongoing progress of Bharat in areas such as economic growth and national defence is a result of the efforts of dedicated individuals, though much more needs to be done.

"Our country is progressing in various fields, but we have a long way to go. It is our responsibility to make Bharat a country of our dreams," he said. Meanwhile, BJP president JP Nadda claimed that India, as the "mother of democracy" and a republic, represents the world, as he called for strengthening the country's constitutional values. *—PTI*

Uncle in UP lures toddler with chocolate, rapes her

ETAH, 26 JAN

A 40-year-old man allegedly raped his three-year-old girl niece in Uttar Pradesh's Etah, police said on Sunday. Officials said the girl's family lodged a complaint on Saturday, alleging that her uncle lured her from the house on the pretext of giving her chocolates and later raped her.

The girl's mother in her complaint identified the accused as Hira Lal, a police officer said. Kotwali Nagar Station House Officer Rajesh Kumar Singh, said police have registered an FIR on the basis of the complaint and started further legal procedure. He said the minor has been admitted to a hospital for medical examination and care. *—PTI*

Malayalam filmmaker Shafi no more

KOCHI, 26 JAN

Filmmaker Shafi, known for bringing laughter to Malayali audiences through his popular films, passed away at a private hospital in Kochi past midnight on Saturday. He was 56. Rasheed MH, fondly known as Shafi, was undergoing treatment after suffering a stroke on 16 January and remained in critical condition for several days before his demise, sources in the hospital said. Actor Vishnu Unnikrishnan confirmed the news, sharing a post on his Facebook page. "Shafi sir has departed, leaving behind laughter and unforgettable stories that will be cherished forever. Tributes!!," he posted. Shafi started his career as assistant director under noted filmmaker Rajasenan. Over a career spanning two decades, Shafi directed over ten films, earning acclaim for his expertise in comedy. *—PTI*

Parents seek govt action in FIITJEE closure

AGRA, 26 JAN

Angry at the abrupt closure of FIITJEE centres in Noida and Ghaziabad, parents of students stormed the firm's unit in Noida's Sector 62 on Saturday, raising slogans against the company and demanding government action on the institution. A case have been registered against the institute's founder DK Goyal and 11 others, Noida Police said on Saturday. Goyal, FIITJEE chief financial officer Rajiv Babbar, chief operating officer Manish Anand and its Greater Noida branch head Ramesh Batlesh have been named in the FIR, a Noida Police spokesperson said. Mrinal, a student's father, said, "I paid Rs 3 lakh for my daughter, who took admission for March. Suddenly, I got the news that the centre has closed down." *—PTI*

West Bengal tableau on display during the 76th Republic Day parade, in New Delhi, on Sunday; With depictions of 'Samudra Manthan', 'Amrit Kalash' and holy men bathing on the banks of Sangam, UP's tableau celebrated the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj; Eco-friendly toys-mounted Andhra Pradesh tableau earned accolades from the audience when it rolled down the Kartavya Path. Known as Etikoppaka Bommalu, the exquisite wooden toys are rooted in a 400-year-old tradition of craftsmanship. ***PHOTOS: PTI***

India shows off military prowess on R-Day

For the first time, a tri-services tableau marched on the Kartavya Path

Akash Army Launcher on display during the 76th Republic Day parade IAF's three Su-30 aircrafts fly in 'Trishul' formation ***PHOTO: PTI***

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

New Delhi, 26 Jan – India marked its 76th Republic Day on Sunday with a spectacular showcase of military prowess, highlighting indigenous weapons and systems, as Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto graced the occasion as the chief guest.

For the first time, a tri-services tableau depicting the spirit of "jointness" among the armed forces featured a synchronized operation involving land, water, and air. The tableau, titled "Shashakt aur Surakshit Bharat" (Strong and Secure India), showcased the indigenous Arjun battle tank, Tejas fighter aircraft, and Advanced Light Helicopter.

The parade began with President Droupadi Murmu taking the salute, soon after her arrival with Subianto at Kartavya Path, the ceremonial heart of New Delhi. Leading the mounted column was the 61 Cavalry, the only active horsed cavalry regiment in the world, followed by mechanized columns and marching contingents. Displays included the T-90 Bhishma tank, NAG missile systems, BrahMos supersonic missile, Pinaka rocket system, Agnibaan launcher, Akash missile system, and the Chetak all-terrain vehicle.

The Army's contingents included the Brigade of the Guards, the Jat Regiment, Garhwal Rifles, Mahar Regiment, Jammu and Kashmir Rifles, and the Corps of Signals. The Indian Navy's 144-member contingent marched, followed by a tableau showcasing India's indigenous naval combatants like INS Surat, INS Nilgiri, and INS Vaghsheer, underscoring the country's "Aatmanirbhar" (self-reliant) Navy.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) contingent featured 144 personnel and was followed by a fly-past of three MiG-29 aircraft in "Baaz formation."

Another highlight was the veterans' tableau, themed "Viksit Bharat ki Ore Sadaiv Agrasar," paying tribute to ex-servicemen. . For the first time, a 352-member Indonesian marching and band contingent participated in a foreign Republic Day parade. *—PTI*

THE GRAND TRIBAL DANCE

- 5000 folk, tribal artistes performed 45 vibrant dances
- In a 1st, they covered the entire Kartavya Path
- The 11-mins performance was curated by Sangeet Natak

8 Manipur cops receive President's medal

Imphal, 26 Jan

Eight Manipur police officers have been awarded the 'President's Medal for Distinguished Service' and 'Medal for Meritorious Service' an official statement said on Sunday. Deputy SP/CID (SB) Sorokhaibam Rudranarayan Singh was awarded the President's Medal for Distinguished Service, the statement said. Inspector Laishram Chaoba Singh of CID(SB), Jemadar Naorem Seilendra Singh of 1st IRB, sub-inspector Sorokhaibam Santosh Singh, Jemadar Khaidem Chandra Singh, havildar Lenpu Kom of 4th IRB, riflemen Lamthianson Chongloi of 1st IRB and assistant sub-inspector Athokpam Tej Singh were awarded Medal for Meritorious Service, it added. *—PTI*

KERALA'S KING AT R-DAY PARADE

Raman Rajamannan, the king of Kerala's Mannan tribal community, made history by attending the 76th Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi. This is the first time a tribal king participated in the Republic Day parade

R-DAY JAM IRKS MUMBAIKARS

MUMBAI, 26 JAN

Train services on Central Railway routes were disrupted on Sunday morning due to an extended mega block for the launch of a bridge girder at Carnac Bridge, causing major inconvenience to Republic Day commuters. The six-hour block, which was delayed until 10:09 am, affected local services between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) and Byculla, and CSMT and Wadala stations. Passengers faced overcrowding at stations, with many walking along the tracks. Several long-distance trains were rescheduled or cancelled, and a labourer was injured during the girder launch. Additional buses were arranged for commuters.

The Dare Devils, the Motorcycle Rider Display Team of the Indian Army's Corps of Signals, perform during parade

LOUD BOOM TRIGGERS PANIC IN ASSAM

GUWAHATI/JAMMU, 26 JAN

A loud sound triggered panic in Guwahati on Sunday morning during Republic Day celebrations. Police confirmed the noise came from a truck parking near the Brahmaputra vegetable market in Beharbari. Locals also reported hearing a similar sound in Rehabari, though authorities found no evidence. The banned ULFA (I) group later claimed responsibility for "blasts" at two locations in Guwahati via an email.

The city had been under heavy security due to a ULFA(I) boycott call. In Jammu and Kashmir, a bomb threat hours before the Republic Day function was later confirmed to be a hoax.

'Society, govt must ally to ban liquor'

BHOPAL/INDORE, 26 JAN

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister **Mohan Yadav** on Sunday said that awareness is being created about liquor prohibition in the state, and the campaign can be successful only with joint efforts from the government and society.

The state cabinet on Friday decided to ban the sale of liquor in 17 religious cities and towns in Madhya Pradesh.

He said the state government has decided to close liquor shops in religious towns of the state on the advice of saints and social organisations.

Yadav said, "Liquor prohibition will remain in force on both banks of the Narmada River in the state as earlier."

While listing the achievements of his government, the chief minister said Madhya Pradesh is making its mark as a developed state and has become an attractive state in the country for investment.

He said the state government has declared 2025 as a "year of industry and employment".

Yadav said the state government received investment proposals worth more than Rs 4.17 lakh crore from seven regional industrial conferences held at different places and programmes organised in major cities of the country and the world.

He said more than four lakh people will get employment if these proposals take concrete shape. The chief minister said the per capita income in the state has increased to Rs 1.42 lakh, and a target has been set to provide government jobs to 2.50 lakh youth of the state in the next five years.

He further highlighted that the production of renewable energy in the state was only 438 MW 12 years ago, and it has increased to 7,300 MW in December 2024. *—PTI*

WB SCHOOL JOBS ROW: SC TO HEAR PLEAS ON MONDAY

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday a batch of pleas challenging the April 2024 Calcutta High Court verdict that has invalidated the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff in government and aided schools in West Bengal.

A bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar is scheduled to hear the matter.

On 15 January, several petitioners argued that the HC nullifying the appointments has adversely impacted the lives and livelihoods. The CJI acknowledged the arguments and reiterated the need for a balance between addressing illegalities and protecting untainted appointees. *—PTI*

2 try to burn self in M'rashtra

MUMBAI, 26 JAN

Two persons attempted to immolate themselves in the presence of state ministers in protest against different issues in the Beed and Dhule districts of Maharashtra on Republic Day on Sunday, police said.

According to the police, a man attempted to set himself on fire in front of minister Dattatray Bharne's convoy, which was heading towards the government rest house in Beed.

The man, Nitin Mujmule, demanded the ouster of chief executive officer Nita Andhare, alleging a scam in the Beed Municipality, an official said.

As soon as the minister's convoy reached Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Bhavan, Mujmule poured petrol on himself and attempted to set himself on fire when police personnel in the vicinity intervened, he said.

A similar incident took place in Dhule, where a man identified as Vavdya Patil tried to immolate himself at a Republic Day event, another official said.

He said Patil made the attempt at a flag-unfurling ceremony in the presence of Guardian Minister Jayakumar Rawal.

Patil was protesting against alleged police inaction on the illegal transportation of cattle from cowsheds in Shirpur city, he said. *—PTI*

LOST JOB, MARRIAGE PROPOSAL

Cops ruined my life: Man detained in Saif case

MUMBAI, 26 JAN

A man who was detained in Durg in Chhattisgarh as a suspect in the 16 January Saif Ali Khan attack case said on Sunday that his life is in complete disarray following police action, leaving him without a job, a snub from his prospective bride and family facing ignominy.

Akash Kanojia, 31, a driver, was detained from Mumbai Lokmanya Tilak Terminus-Kolkata Shalimar Jnaneshwari Express at Durg station by the Railway Protection Force on January 18 after a tip off from Mumbai police.

On the morning of 19 January, Mumbai police arrested Bangladeshi national Shariful Islam Shehzad Mohammad Rohilla Amin Fakir alias Vijay Das from neighbouring Thane, after which the Durg RPF allowed Kanojia to go leave.

Saif Ali Khan was stabbed repeatedly by an intruder during a robbery attempt at his 12th floor residence in Satguru Sharan in Mumbai's Bandra area on 16 January.

"My family was left shocked

and in tears after media started showing my pictures and claimed I was the main suspect. One mistake of the Mumbai police ruined my life. They failed to notice I had a moustache and the person in the CCTV grab did not," he told PTI.

"I was travelling to meet my prospective bride when I was detained at Durg and then taken to Raipur. The police team that reached there assaulted me," he claimed.

Kanojia said after being released, his mother asked him to come home, but his life started unravelling from there on.

"When I called my employer, he asked me not to report to work. My grandmother then told me the family of my prospective bride had refused to go ahead with marriage talks," he said. *—PTI*

HIGHWAY TO NOWHERE

A defiant old man, Huang Ping, who refused to sell his home to make way for a highway in Jinxi, China, now lives in the middle of the motorway after it was built around his two-storey house. Despite being offered £180,000 (approximately Rs 2 crore) in compensation, he chose to stay put. Now, surrounded by a construction site, the constant dust and noise from the builders are making him regret his decision.
PHOTO: X

'Optimism, good attitude & community add 7 yrs to life'

A 2002 study by researchers at Yale University, which revealed that older adults with positive beliefs about aging lived an average of 7.5 years longer, is making waves once again. Recent studies have reaffirmed this finding, highlighting that optimism not only extends life spans but also improves emotional health across diverse racial and ethnic groups.

Legendary actor and activist Jane Fonda, now 87, is using her platform to challenge ageism and encourage people to embrace aging with positivity. In a recent CBS segment, Fonda teamed up with fellow anti-ageism advocate Ashton Applewhite to emphasise the transformative power of optimism. "Aging is a privilege," Fonda declared. "And it could be one of the best chapters of your life."

Recent studies have reaffirmed that optimism not only extends life spans but also improves emotional health across diverse racial and ethnic groups
PHOTO: PIXABAY

The Science of Optimism and Longevity

The 2002 Yale study set the stage for ongoing research into the relationship between optimism and longevity. More recent studies published in The Journals of Gerontology and The Journal of the American Geriatrics Society have validated and expanded upon these findings. One study analysed data from over 1,50,000 women aged 50–79 as part of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI). The research revealed that the most optimistic women lived, on average, 5.4 per cent longer—approximately 4.4 years—than their less optimistic peers.

They were also more likely to achieve "exceptional longevity," defined as living past 90 years. Importantly, these trends were consistent across non-Hispanic White, Black, Hispanic/Latina, and Asian women.

While lifestyle factors such as exercise, diet, and avoiding smoking explained part of the optimism-longevity link, they accounted for only 25 per cent of the correlation.

This suggests other mechanisms are at play. Another study focusing on older men found that optimism reduced exposure to daily stressors, which in turn led to fewer negative emotions. Researchers concluded that optimism helps individuals reframe or avoid stressful situations, contributing to better health and emotional well-being.

Ageism and Its Impact

Fonda and Applewhite argue that societal attitudes toward aging often hinder people from embracing this stage of life. The beauty industry, for example, profits from "anti-aging" products that stigmatise natural changes like wrinkles and grey hair. Additionally, a relentless cycle of bad news in the media can exacerbate feelings of depression and nihilism.

Many people also associate aging with inevitable decline, from physical ailments to social isolation. However, studies show that social disconnection poses a greater threat to health than aging itself.

'The world wants us to believe that aging is about sadness, disease, and death,' Fonda said. 'But it doesn't have to be that way. Aging can be a process of growth, self-discovery, and joy.'

The Role of Community and Creativity

Fonda and Applewhite believe that fostering connections and engaging in creative activities can help combat the negative stereotypes surrounding aging. "We know that being in a community is good for us," Applewhite explained.

"We know that having a purpose is good for us. But the health benefits of being in an art class, specifically, are fascinating."

Studies from the National Endowment for the Arts show that older adults who participate in art classes experience increased mental engagement, physical activity, and social interaction. They visit the doctor less often, are less likely to fall, and report higher levels of happiness. "Art classes are a great way to build community," Fonda added. Whether it's painting, singing, theatre, dance, or even graffiti, creative expression can strengthen relationships and enhance well-being.

Aging with Positivity

Fonda and Applewhite emphasise that positivity is a choice, albeit not always an easy one. It requires effort to counteract societal messages and personal fears about aging. However, the benefits are well worth it. Fonda highlighted a global "U-curve of happiness," which shows that people are often happiest at the beginnings and ends of their lives.

"So much of your life gets better as you age," Fonda said. "We get less stressed. We become kinder to ourselves and braver. We're less judgmental. And best of all, we stop caring so much about what other people thinks of us."

Applewhite echoed this sentiment, calling aging "a universal human experience" that can lead to growth and self-knowledge. She and Fonda want people to understand that optimism isn't just a feel-good mantra; it's a scientifically backed strategy for healthier, longer lives.

Moving Forward

The findings from these studies underscore the importance of promoting optimism as a modifiable characteristic.

Writing exercises, therapy, and community engagement are just a few ways to cultivate a positive outlook. For Fonda, the message is clear: aging is not something to fear but to embrace.

"In the next few minutes, Ashton and I are going to add seven and a half years to your life," Fonda joked in the CBS segment.

As Fonda put it, "Aging isn't the end; it's the start of a whole new chapter." *—Salar News*

SALAR سالار

Women-centric agenda & schemes lead Delhi polls

Ahead of Delhi Assembly Elections, experts have highlighted the growing focus on women-centric schemes signalling a deeper acknowledgment of women's critical role in shaping electoral outcomes.

However, experts have also raised concerns about the sustainability and long-term consequences of relying on populist measures to secure their support.

With women accounting for nearly half of Delhi's electorate, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and Congress have prioritised women-focused promises in their campaigns.

The BJP's Mahila Samridhi Yojana pledges Rs 2,500 per month to women voters, along with a Rs 21,000 maternity benefit and a Rs 500 subsidy on LPG cylinders.

Similarly, AAP has promised Rs 2,100 per month for women, while Congress has floated its 'Pyari Didi Yojana' with Rs 2,500 monthly cash transfers.

While these announcements align with a broader trend in Indian politics, reflected in schemes like Madhya Pradesh's 'Ladli Behna Yojana' and Maharashtra's 'Ladki Bahin Scheme', critics have question the feasibility of such measures.

Jagdeep Chhokar, founder of poll rights body the Association for Democratic Reforms, expressed skepticism about the efficacy of these schemes.

"Freebies only offer short-term relief. Teaching people skills to become self-reliant should be the focus," he said, adding that voters must be made aware of the cost of these benefits, which ultimately come from public funds.

"Even the poorest pay taxes indirectly, whether through GST on essential items or services," he noted.

Brinda Karat, CPI(M) leader and activist, views these promises as a double-edged sword.

"Such schemes reflect the growing assertion of women as independent citizens, but they often reduce women to mere beneficiaries rather than rights holders," she said.

While welcoming cash transfers as recognition of women's unpaid labour contributing nearly 7 per cent to India's GDP, she emphasized that the narrative must shift toward empowering women with rights, not just sops.

Political analysts argue that these promises, though populist, could transform women into more independent voters.

Professor Mohammad Aftab Alam of Aligarh Muslim University highlighted how such schemes can disrupt traditional voting patterns.

"Women voters often rely on male family members for political decisions. Targeted welfare measures can empower them to make independent choices," he said.

Sushila Ramaswamy, a professor at Jesus and Mary College, pointed out the flexibility and dignity offered by cash transfers.

"Unlike material goods, cash allows women to make their own decisions, boosting their autonomy. This has proven to be a game-changer, especially for women from weaker sections," she said, adding that parties in power have a distinct advantage in delivering these benefits before elections building voter trust.

Women voters across economic strata have expressed varied perspectives on these schemes.

Shanti Devi, a vegetable vendor from Haiderpur, called cash assistance transformative.

"It can help pay school fees or rent during tough times. It's better than goods because I can choose what I need most," she said.

Seema Singh, a domestic worker from Mayur Vihar, agreed, citing existing benefits like free bus travel as significant savings. "If they add cash transfers, it will give me more security," she said.

However, middle-class women have different priorities.

"These schemes are helpful for the poor, but what about better roads, improved infrastructure, and quality education?" asked Pooja Verma, a schoolteacher in Sarita Vihar.

For Anjali Kumari, a beautician in Madanpur Khadar, the need for economic opportunities outweighs short-term benefits.

"The schemes are helpful, but they won't lift us out of poverty. We need better jobs and access to loans," she said.

The growing focus on women-centric welfare schemes underscores their electoral importance, but experts warn of the need for sustainable development measures.

As Delhi votes on 5 February, the effectiveness of these promises will not only be tested at the ballot box but also in the broader discourse on women's empowerment. *—PTI*

With women accounting for nearly half of Delhi's electorate, BJP, AAP and Congress have prioritised women-focused promises in their campaigns
PHOTOS: ANI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Why Egypt & Jordan are unlikely to accept Trump's relocation plan

President Donald Trump's suggestion that Egypt and Jordan take in Palestinians from the war-ravaged Gaza Strip is likely to be met with a hard "no" from the two US allies and the Palestinians themselves who fear Israel would never allow them to return.

Trump floated the idea on Saturday, saying he would urge the leaders of the two Arab countries to take in Gaza's now largely homeless population, so that "we just clean out that whole thing." He added that resettling Gaza's population "could be temporary or long term."

"It's literally a demolition site right now," Trump said, referring to the vast destruction caused by Israel's 15-month military campaign against Hamas, now paused by a fragile ceasefire.

There was no immediate comment from Egypt, Jordan, Israel or Palestinian officials.

The idea is likely to be welcomed by Israel, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right governing partners have long advocated what they describe as the voluntary migration of large numbers of Palestinians and the reestablishment of Jewish settlements in Gaza.

Human rights groups have already accused Israel of ethnic cleansing, which United Nations experts have defined as a policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove the civilian population of another group from certain areas "by violent and terror-inspiring means."

A History of Displacement

Before and during the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, some 700,000 Palestinians — a majority of the prewar population — fled or were driven from their homes in what is now Israel, an event they commemorate as the Nakba — Arabic for catastrophe.

Israel refused to allow them to return because it would have resulted in a Palestinian majority within its borders. The refugees and their descendants now number around 6 million, with large communities in Gaza, where they make up the majority of the population, as well as the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

In the 1967 Mideast war, when Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 300,000 more Palestinians fled, mostly into Jordan.

The decades-old refugee crisis has been a major driver of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and was one of the thorniest issues in peace talks that last broke down in 2009. The Palestinians claim a right of return, while Israel says they should be absorbed by surrounding Arab countries.

US tariffs, one of US President Donald Trump's favourite economic tools, or outright sanctions could be devastating for Jordan and Egypt
PHOTOS: PTI

Many Palestinians view the latest war in Gaza, in which entire neighbourhoods have been shelled to oblivion and 90% of the population of 2.3 million have been forced from their homes, as a new Nakba. They fear that if large numbers of Palestinians leave Gaza, then they too may never return.

A red line for countries that made peace with Israel decades ago

Egypt and Jordan fiercely rejected the idea of accepting Gaza refugees early in the war, when it was floated by some Israeli officials.

Both countries have made peace with Israel but support the creation of a Palestinian state in the occupied West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war. They fear that the permanent displacement of Gaza's population could make that impossible.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi has also warned of the security implications of transferring large numbers of Palestinians to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, bordering Gaza.

Hamas and other militant groups are deeply rooted in Palestinian society and are likely to move with the refugees, which would mean that future wars would be fought on Egyptian soil, something that could unravel the historic Camp David peace treaty, a cornerstone of regional stability.

That's what happened in Lebanon in the 1970s, when Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation, the leading militant group of its time, transformed the country's south into a launchpad for attacks on Israel. The refugee crisis and the PLO's actions helped push Lebanon into a 15-year civil war in 1975. Israel invaded twice and occupied southern Lebanon from 1982 until 2000.

Jordan, which clashed with the PLO and expelled it under similar circumstances in 1970, already hosts more than 2 million Palestinian refugees, the majority of whom have been granted citizenship.

Israeli ultranationalists have long suggested that Jordan be considered a Palestinian state so that Israel can keep the West Bank, which they view as the biblical heartland of the Jewish people. Jordan's monarchy has vehemently rejected that scenario.

Can Trump force Egypt and Jordan to accept refugees?

That depends on how serious Trump is about the idea and how far he is prepared to go.

US tariffs — one of Trump's favourite economic tools — or outright sanctions could be devastating for Jordan and Egypt. The two countries receive billions of dollars in American aid each year, and Egypt is already mired in an economic crisis.

But allowing an influx of refugees could also be destabilizing. Egypt says it is currently hosting some 9 million migrants, including refugees from Sudan's civil war. Jordan, with a population of less than 12 million, is hosting over 700,000 refugees, mainly from Syria.

That would potentially complicate efforts to broker a historic agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel to normalise relations, something Trump tried to do during his previous term and expects to complete in his current one. *—PTI*

Trump wants Gaza Strip 'cleaned out'

US Prez would like Jordan, Egypt, other Arab nations to accept more refugees

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE/ LAS VEGAS, 26 JAN

US President Donald Trump on Saturday said that he'd like to see Jordan, Egypt and other Arab nations increase the number of Palestinian refugees they are accepting from the Gaza Strip — potentially moving out enough of the population to "just clean out" the war-torn area to create a virtual clean slate.

During a 20-minute question-and-answer session with reporters aboard Air Force One on Saturday, Trump also said he's ended his predecessor's hold on sending 2,000-pound bombs to Israel. That lifts a pressure point that had been meant to reduce civilian casualties during Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza that is now halted by a tenuous ceasefire.

"We released them today," Trump said of the bombs. "They've been waiting for them for a long time." Asked why he lifted the ban on those bombs, Trump responded, "Because they bought them."

President Donald Trump speaks at an event at the Circa Resort and Casino in Las Vegas **PHOTO: PTI**

Talk with Putin soon

Trump has said that he would soon speak to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin and help in settling the war in Ukraine.

Trump's comments came a day after Putin said Russia is ready for talks with the US on a broad range of issues.

The President has repeatedly said he would not have allowed the conflict to start if he had been in office when the war began.

Taxes on tips at Vegas

Trump came to Las Vegas on Saturday to crow about his promise to eliminate taxes on tips, signalling to allies in Congress the importance of the policy but stopping well short of offering details for making the slogan a reality.

Instead, Trump spent most of his 40 minutes speaking to roughly 1,000 supporters in a casino ballroom lauding his November election victory, mocking former President Joe Biden's administration and touting his torrent of executive actions since taking office Monday.

Aides said Trump's stop in Nevada was to deliver an "economic-focused message" built around his familiar promise to hospitality industry workers to remove the tax on gratuity income. —*PTI*

Trump says he believes US will get Greenland

WASHINGTON DC, 26 JAN

Insisting that Greenland needs to be part of the US, President Donald Trump said that it would be an "unfriendly act" on the part of Denmark if they did not let this happen.

Greenland, which is under the control of Denmark, is the world's largest island.

"I think we're going to have it (Greenland). I think the people want to be with us. As you know, there's 55,000 people there. They want to be with us," Trump said on Saturday.

Trump's comments come after reports that Danish PM Mette Frederiksen insisted Greenland was not for sale in a fiery phone call with the US president last week.

"I don't really know what claim Denmark has to but it would be a very unfriendly act if they didn't allow that to happen because it's for protection of the free world. It's not for us. It's for the free world right now," Trump said in response to a question.

Trump said that the people of Greenland don't like the way they've been treated by Denmark. "You have Russian ships; you have Chinese ships. You have ships from various countries. It's not a good situation. I believe we'll get that. I believe Greenland we'll get because it really has to do with freedom of the world," Trump said. —*PTI*

Brazil condemns US after deportees arrive in handcuffs

BRAZILIA, 26 JAN

Brazil strongly condemned the US on Saturday after dozens of deportees arrived to the country in handcuffs. A plane carrying 88 passengers, 16 US security agents and eight crew members was scheduled to arrive in Belo Horizonte, made an emergency landing in Manaus due to a technical error, said a statement by the Brazilian government. Brazilian police received the plane at the instructions of Justice Minister Ricardo Lewandowski and intervened, asking US agents to remove handcuffs from the deportees. Lewandowski reportedly told President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva it was a "blatant disrespect" of their fundamental rights. —*DW News*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Belarus strongman Lukashenko likely to win a 7th term

MINSK, 26 JAN

Presidential polls are under way in Belarus, with long-time leader Alexander Lukashenko expected to extend his more than three decades in power in the absence of any real opposition. Voters began casting their ballots at 8am local time on Sunday in the country's first presidential vote since Lukashenko crushed mass protests against his government in 2020 and permitted Russia to use Belarusian territory for its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The 70-year-old former collective farm boss has been in power in Belarus since 1994 and is seeking a seventh term. The country's last presidential election in 2020 ended with nationwide protests, unprecedented in the history of the country of nine million people. The opposition and Western nations accused Lukashenko of rigging the election and imposed sanctions. —*Ágencies*

Congo severs diplomatic ties with Rwanda

KINSHASA, 26 JAN

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is severing diplomatic ties with Rwanda and the United Nations Security Council has called an emergency meeting as the fighting between the Congolese army and the M23 armed group intensifies. The three-year-old M23 rebellion in DRC's east has intensified this month, with the rebels seizing control of more territory, prompting the UN to warn of a broader regional war. The Congolese troops and the peacekeepers are trying to stop an M23 advance on the eastern city of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. M23, or the March 23 Movement, is an armed group that broke away from the DRC army more than 10 years ago. Since its resurgence in 2022, the group has continued to gain ground in the eastern DRC. —*PTI*

US, India partnership will define 21st century, says Rubio

Washington DC, 26 Jan

The India–US partnership continues to reach newer heights and will be a defining relationship of the 21st century, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said while greeting the people of India on the occasion of its Republic Day. "We look forward to deepening our cooperation in the year ahead, including by advancing our joint efforts in space research and coordination within the Quad to promote a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region," Rubio said. India, the US, Australia and Japan came together 20 years ago to extend assistance in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. The coalition is now known as Quad. —*PTI*

Musk tells Germans not to feel guilty

BERLIN, 26 JAN

Elon Musk made a virtual appearance at a rally for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party on Saturday, reiterating his support ahead of the country's 23 February snap election and telling the crowd that it's time to "move on" from "past guilt."

The Tesla CEO addressed the crowd alongside party leader Alice Weidel, saying that the party is the "best hope for Germany" and calling to "preserve German culture" and "protect the German people."

Musk's endorsement of the AfD last month drew strong rebukes, including from German Chancellor Olaf Scholz who said the tech billionaire's support of the far-right "endangers" European democracy. —*Politico*

Elon Musk appears on a giant screen at a rally for the Alternative for Germany party in Berlin on Saturday **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

I think DOGE, the idea that looking at government expenditures on a sort of zero-based budgeting approach, could be a valuable thing

—BILL GATES, Former CEO of Microsoft

Israel to miss deadline for withdrawal from Lebanon

JERUSALEM, 26 JAN

Israel's military has said it will not complete its withdrawal from southern Lebanon by Sunday as outlined in its ceasefire agreement with Hezbollah militants.

The confirmation came on Saturday while another fragile ceasefire – between Israel and the Hamas militant group – saw a second release of hostages from Gaza and Palestinian prisoners from Israeli custody.

The ceasefire deal for Lebanon gave both sides 60 days to remove their forces from southern Lebanon and for the Lebanese army to move in and secure the area.

Israel says Hezbollah and the Lebanese army have not met their obligations, while Lebanon accuses the Israeli army of hindering the Lebanese military from taking over. Israel also says it will not allow displaced Palestinians to begin returning to northern Gaza as expected by Sunday, because a civilian hostage who was supposed to be released by Hamas had not been freed on Saturday. Mediators are trying to resolve the dispute. —*PTI*

A view of the destruction caused by the Israeli air and ground offensive in Mays al-Jabal, southern Lebanon **PHOTO: PTI**

'APPALLING' ACT

70 killed in attack on Sudan hospital

DUBAI, 26 JAN

Around 70 people were killed in an attack on the only functional hospital in the besieged city of El Fasher in Sudan, the chief of the World Health Organisation said on Sunday. The attack was part of a series coming as the African nation's civil war escalated in recent days.

The attack on the Saudi Teaching Maternal Hospital, which local officials blamed on the rebel Rapid Support Forces, came as the group has seen apparent battlefield losses to the Sudanese military and allied forces under the command of army chief Gen Abdel-Fattah Burhan. That includes Burhan appearing near a burning oil refinery north of Khartoum on Saturday that his forces said they seized from the RSF.

International mediation attempts and pressure tactics, including a US assessment that the RSF and its proxies are committing genocide and sanctions targeting Burhan, have not halted the fighting.

In the Saudi hospital attack in El Fasher, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus posted the death toll in a post on X.

"The appalling attack on Saudi Hospital in El Fasher, Sudan, led to 19 injuries and 70 deaths among patients and companions," Ghebreyesus wrote. "At the time of the attack, the hospital was packed with patients receiving care." —*PTI*

Rain in LA helps firefighters, risks toxic ash runoff

LOS ANGELES, 26 JAN

After weeks of windy and dry weather, rain has fallen in parched Southern California and is expected to aid firefighters who are mopping up multiple wildfires. But potentially heavy downpours on charred hillsides could bring new troubles such as toxic ash runoff.

Los Angeles County crews spent much of the past week removing vegetation, shoring up slopes and reinforcing roads in devastated areas of the Palisades and Eaton fires, which reduced entire neighbourhoods to rubble and ash after breaking out during powerful winds 7 January.

Most of the region was forecast to get around 2.5cm of precipitation over several days, but "the threat is high enough to prepare for the worst-case scenario" of localized cloudbursts causing mud and debris to flow down hills, the National Weather Service said on social media.

"So the problem would be if one of those showers happens to park itself over a burn area," weather service meteorologist Carol Smith said. "That could be enough to create debris flows."

Rainfall that began late Saturday was expected to increase Sunday and possibly last into early Tuesday, forecasters said. Flood watches were issued for some burn areas, while snow was likely in the mountains. —*PTI*

North Korea tests cruise missile system

SEOUL, 26 JAN

North Korea on Sunday said it tested a cruise missile system, its third known weapons display this year, and vowed "the toughest" response to what it called the escalation of US-South Korean military drills that target the North.

The moves suggest North Korea may continue its weapons tests and confrontational stance against the US for now, even though President Donald Trump said he intends to reach out to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said Kim observed the test of sea-to-surface strategic cruise guided weapons on Saturday.

The term "strategic" implies the missiles are nuclear-capable. The KCNA said the missiles hit their targets at a distance of 1,500km. It cited Kim as saying that North Korea's war deterrence capabilities "are being perfected more thoroughly" and affirming that his country will make "strenuous efforts" to defend stability "on the basis of more powerfully developed military muscle."

North Korea's foreign ministry also criticised the US for committing "serious military provocations aiming at" the country with a series of military exercises with South Korea this month. —*PTI*

The missiles hit their targets at 1,500km **PHOTO: X**

China steps up military activity around Taiwan

TAIPEI, 26 JAN

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) stated that it detected six Chinese military aircraft and seven naval vessels around Taiwan between 6am on Saturday and 6am on Sunday. According to the MND, of the six People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft, two crossed the Taiwan Strait median line in the country's southwestern air defence identification zone (ADIZ). In a post on X, Taiwan's MND said, "6 PLA aircraft and 7 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 a.m. (UTC+8) today. 2 of the aircraft crossed the median line and entered Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ. We have monitored the situation and responded accordingly." On Saturday, Taiwan reported 28 Chinese aircraft and eight naval vessels near its territory. —*ANI*

GROPING IN THE DARK

CIA not 100% sure about COVID origin

WASHINGTON DC, 26 JAN

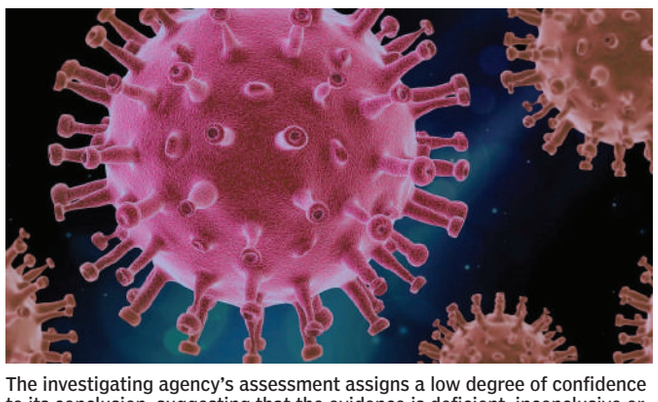
The CIA now believes that the virus responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic has most likely originated from a lab, said an assessment released on Saturday that points the finger at China even while acknowledging that the spy agency has "low confidence" in its own conclusion.

The finding is not the result of any new intelligence, and the report was completed at the behest of the Biden administration and former CIA Director William Burns. It was declassified and released on Saturday on the orders of President Donald Trump's pick to lead the agency, John Ratcliffe, who was sworn in Thursday as director.

The nuanced finding suggests that the agency believes the totality of evidence makes a lab origin more likely than a natural origin. But the agency's assessment assigns a low degree of confidence to this conclusion, suggesting that the evidence is deficient, inconclusive or contradictory.

Earlier reports on the origins of COVID-19 have split over whether the coronavirus emerged from a Chinese lab, potentially by mistake, or whether it arose naturally. The new assessment is not likely to settle the debate. In fact, intelligence officials say it may never be resolved, due to a lack of cooperation from Chinese authorities.

The CIA "continues to assess that both research-related and natural origin scenarios of the COVID-19 pandemic remain plausible," the agency said. Instead of new evidence, the conclusion was based on fresh analyses of intelligence about the spread of the virus, its scientific properties and the work and conditions of China's virology labs. —*PTI*



The investigating agency's assessment assigns a low degree of confidence to its conclusion, suggesting that the evidence is deficient, inconclusive or contradictory **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

- The report was declassified and released on Saturday on the orders of President Donald Trump's pick to lead the CIA, John Ratcliffe, who was sworn in Thursday as the agency's director

Martial law: S Korean prosecutors indict Yoon

SEOUL, 26 JAN

South Korean prosecutors on Sunday indicted the impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his imposition of martial law last month, news reports said.

Yonhap news agency reported that the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office indicted Yoon over rebellion in connection with his December 3 decree that plunged the country into massive political turmoil. Other South Korean media outlets have carried similar reports.

Repeated calls to the prosecutors' office were unanswered.

Yoon was earlier impeached and arrested over the martial law decree. The Constitutional Court is separately deliberating whether to formally dismiss Yoon as president or reinstate him.

Yoon, a conservative, has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing, calling his martial law a legitimate act of governance meant to raise public awareness of the danger of the liberal-controlled National Assembly which obstructed his agenda and impeached top officials. During his announcement of martial law, Yoon called the assembly "a den of criminals" and vowed to eliminate "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces". —*PTI*

- Yoon, a conservative, has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing, calling his martial law a legitimate act of governance meant to raise public awareness of the danger of the liberal-controlled National Assembly

Hindustan Zinc likely to turn net debt free by FY26

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc Ltd (HZL) is likely to turn net debt-free by the next financial year despite significant investment in capacity expansion, according to a report. According to brokerage firm Ventura Securities global demand for base metals -- zinc and lead, is expected to grow at a CAGR of 6/7 per cent... Domestically, India is a net exporter of zinc while having a deficit in lead supplies. Both these circumstances are favourable to HZL. The country's largest producer of zinc, lead and silver had earlier said that it expects to reduce its debt to about Rs 2,000 crore by March-end from about Rs 6,000 crore. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

On R-Day, SEBI launches repository 'Dharohar'

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Capital markets regulator SEBI on Sunday said it has launched a digital knowledge repository, "Dharohar - Milestones in the Indian securities market", on the occasion of the country's 76th Republic Day. The securities market, known for its diverse products, participants, and institutions, has a long-standing history of organised trading over the past 150 years, SEBI said. The repository features a website that also includes an interactive timeline of significant events and 3D galleries, offering an engaging experience to visitors, it added. It is designed to cater to a wide audience, including students, investors, researchers, journalists, market participants and the general public offering insights into the market's diverse products, participants, and institutions. The repository, Dharohar, can be accessed at www.mism.org. *—PTI*

'PLI benefits to handicrafts help create more jobs'

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

The government in its coming Budget must extend fiscal benefits under the PLI (production linked incentive) scheme to sectors such as handicrafts and leather that can create more jobs, Deloitte said on Sunday. It also suggested that the existing PLI schemes must continue in sectors that have seen success, such as electronics, auto and semiconductors. The government in 2021 announced PLI schemes for 14 sectors, including telecommunications, white goods, textiles, manufacturing of medical devices, automobiles, speciality steel, food products, high-efficiency solar PV modules, advanced chemistry cell battery, drones, and pharma, with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore. To achieve the USD 1-trillion target by 2030, the government will have to create a roadmap. *—PTI*

HMSI: Two wheelers not luxury, tax cut needed to spur

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Two-wheelers are a necessity and not luxury in the current Indian context and taxes on these vehicles must be reduced as the industry is staring at a single-digit growth next fiscal with affordability becoming an issue, according to a senior executive of Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India. There is also a requirement for income tax rationalisation to enable middle-income people start spending again, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) Director Sales and Marketing Yogesh Mathur told PTI in an interview. In the ongoing fiscal, motorcycle sales have not done as well as the scooter segment due to softness in demand from rural market, due to a variety of factors including delayed monsoons, he added. *—PTI*

Power producers might face ₹1,000 crore loss

Loss is amid CERC barring payments until start of operations

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

An association of power producers on 23 January wrote to CERC, seeking a review of the norm **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

Power producers have opposed Central Electricity Regulatory Commission's new norm of not mandating any payments for power they supply to grid before start of commercial production as it may lead to heavy losses.

An association of power producers on 23 January wrote to CERC on the new provision for so-called infirm power, seeking a review of the norm.

The decision to not pay for infirm power will lead to a huge loss. Thermal power generators can incur an expense to an extent of Rs 1,000 crore during the 6-12 month trial period towards infirm power before they achieve commercial operation of the plant.

Earlier, the regulatory regime allowed recovery of some price/cost towards fuel expenses of the infirm energy injected into the grid. Such recovery was in the form of either actual fuel cost or applicable rate. There was no situation where a generating company was deprived of any recovery for the infirm energy injected into the grid.

CERC last month amended this provision to provide for 'nil' payment for infirm power. This will lead to substantial loss for the plant even before it starts commercial operation because infirm power typically flows for 180 days to 1 year.

This will particularly impact merchant power plants that sell power in the market and do not have long-term power purchase agreements. The situation is also challenging for power plants acquired through NCLT proceedings, on an 'as-is, where-is' basis.

As per the extant rules of the central government, a thermal generating station is not entitled for supply of linkage coal till declaration of commerciality. In other words, testing and commissioning activities have to be carried out by consuming alternate costlier domestic or imported coal which severely hurts the financial condition of the generating companies, it said.

The CERC, it said, should bear in mind that most of the state electricity regulatory commissions adopt the regulations promulgated by CERC and as a result, the intra-generating companies may also be subjected to serious financial constraints, as per the present amendment by CERC, are adopted by them. *—PTI*

INDIA, INDONESIA SIGN MoU

Equity MF inflows soar to near ₹4 lakh cr in 2024

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Equity mutual funds witnessed a remarkable surge in inflows to nearly Rs 4 lakh crore in 2024, more than double the amount recorded in the preceding year, reflecting strong investor confidence and a continued shift towards long-term investing, particularly through Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs).

Despite the strong performance in 2024, the outlook for 2025 appears cautious. The mutual fund industry has started to see a slowdown in equity fund flows since early December, a trend attributed to increased market volatility, Santosh Joseph, Co-founder and CEO of Germinate Investor Services, said.

Historically, inflows into equity funds are closely tied to market performance, and periods of market uncertainty often result in subdued investor activity.

However, long-term investors may continue to stay the course, benefiting from the wealth creation potential of equity markets when conditions stabilize, he added.

In 2024, the total inflow into equity and equity-oriented schemes stood at Rs 3.94 lakh crore, compared to Rs 1.61 lakh crore in 2023, according to data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

Meanwhile, India and Indonesia's mutual funds industry have signed an MoU to enhance bilateral financial and economic best practices through cooperation. *—PTI/ANI*

4 of 10 firms lose ₹1.25 lakh cr

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Reliance took the biggest hit, in line with weak investors **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

The combined market valuation of four of the top 10 valued firms declined by Rs 1,25,397.45 crore last week, with Reliance Industries taking the biggest hit, in line with weak investors' sentiment at Dalal Street.

Last week, the BSE benchmark index declined by 428.87 points or 0.55 per cent, and the Nifty dipped 111 points or 0.47 per cent.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries slumped by Rs 74,969.35 crore to Rs 16,85,998.34 crore.

The valuation of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LICI) eroded by Rs 21,251.99 crore to Rs 5,19,472.06 crore.

State Bank of India's valuation diminished by Rs 17,626.13 crore to Rs 6,64,304.09 crore and that of ICICI Bank tumbled Rs 11,549.98 crore to Rs 8,53,945.19 crore.

On the other hand, the market capitalisation (mcap) of Infosys surged Rs 24,934.38 crore to Rs 7,78,612.76 crore.

HDFC Bank added Rs 9,828.08 crore taking its valuation to Rs 12,61,627.89 crore.

The mcap of Bharti Airtel jumped Rs 9,398.89 crore to Rs 9,36,413.86 crore and that of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) climbed Rs 9,262.3 crore to Rs 15,01,976.67 crore.

Hindustan Unilever's mcap soared Rs 3,442.15 crore to Rs 5,56,594.67 crore.

ITC's valuation rallied Rs 1,689.08 crore to Rs 5,52,392.01 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the country's most valued firm by mcap, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and LIC. *—PTI*

ANALYSTS SAY

US Fed rate, Budget to drive markets this week

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

In an eventful week ahead, stock market investors will take cues from major events like the US Federal Reserve's interest rate decision, the upcoming Union Budget and Q3 earnings, analysts said.

Besides, global factors, trading activity of foreign investors, rupee-dollar trend and movement of international oil benchmark Brent crude would also influence trading in the equity market, according to experts.

Additionally, movements in the US bond yields and the Dollar Index will remain important to track. Signs of reversals in these two areas could drive positivity in global markets, Meena said.

For the Indian equity market, FII flows will continue to play a crucial role, he added.

Stock markets will remain open for trading on February 1, Saturday, for the Union Budget presentation, BSE and NSE had announced last month.

This week is important, not just for the equity markets but for the economy as well, with the Union Budget scheduled for February 1 (Saturday)," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Last week, the BSE benchmark index declined 428.87 points or 0.55 per cent, and the Nifty dipped 111 points or 0.47 per cent. *—PTI*

INDIAN REFINERS TEST FOWE'S EMULSION TECH

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Indian oil refineries have initiated tests of fuel emulsion systems from a Monaco-based company to clean highly polluting bunker fuel as they eye significant benefits, including substantial fuel cost savings and a reduction in environmental impact of the high carbon-emitting fuel used in ships.

Two state-owned oil firms deployed Fowe Eco Solutions' (FOWE) patented Cavitech devices at their refinery and depot installations to check the result of emulsified fuel oil (bunker fuel), sources aware of the matter said.

Trials showed substantial reduction in emissions, they said, adding the refiners are now looking at tests for its commercial use. *—PTI*

India's exports to US up 5.57% to $60B in FY25

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

The country's exports rose by 5.57 per cent to USD 59.93 billion during April-December this fiscal on account of healthy demand in the American market for domestic goods, according to government data.

During December, the shipments increased by 8.49 per cent to USD 7 billion, the data showed.

On the other hand, imports during the first nine months of 2024-25 grew by 1.91 per cent to USD 33.4 billion, while in December it was up by 9.88 per cent to USD 3.77 billion.

According to experts, going by the trend, the total trade between the two countries will continue to grow in the coming months also.

The bilateral trade during April-December 2024-25 stood at USD 93.4 billion, as against USD 94.6 billion between India and China.

The experts added that the possible trade war between the US and China will give huge export potential for Indian exporters. The US is the largest trading partner of India from 2021-22. *—PTI*

India's foreign exchange reserves continue to fall

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

India's foreign exchange reserves continue to decline, extending their slump for about four months now. The country's forex reserves have fallen in 15 of the past 16 weeks, hitting an 11-month low.

In the week ending 17 January, India's foreign exchange reserves declined by USD 1.88 billion to USD 623.983 billion, according to the latest data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

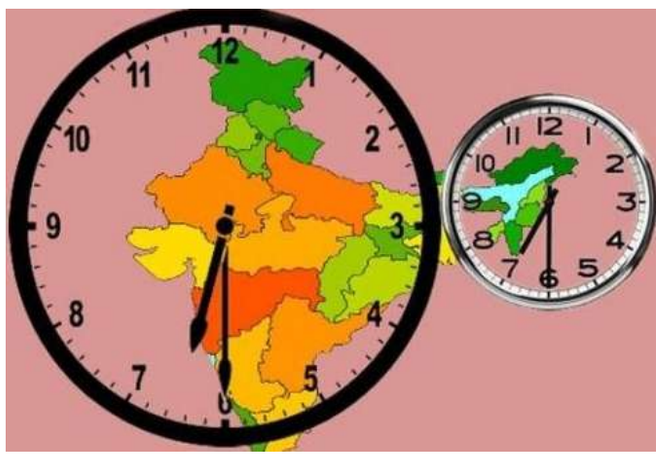
The reserves have been falling ever since they touched an all-time high of USD 704.89 billion in September, and they are now over 10 percent lower than the peak.

The decline in reserves is likely due to RBI intervention, aimed at preventing a sharp depreciation of the Rupee. The Indian rupee is now at or near its all-time low against the US dollar.

Gold reserves currently amount to USD 68.947 billion, with a USD 1.06 billion jump in the past week, according to RBI data. *—PTI*

ONOE: Govt drafts rules for mandatory adoption of IST

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN



Key provisions include, prohibition of time references other than IST for official and commercial purposes **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

In a move to standardise timekeeping, the government has drafted comprehensive rules mandating the exclusive use of Indian Standard Time (IST) across all official and commercial platforms, with the Consumer Affairs Ministry seeking public feedback by 14 February.

The Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2024, aims to establish a legal framework for standardising timekeeping practices, mandating IST as the sole time reference for legal, administrative, commercial, and official documents.

Key provisions include, prohibition of time references other than IST for official and commercial purposes, mandatory display of IST in government offices and public institutions and requirement for time-synchronization systems to ensure reliability, availability, and cybersecurity.

The proposal comes as part of efforts to ensure precise timekeeping in critical national infrastructure, including telecommunications, banking, defence, and emerging technologies like 5G and artificial intelligence.

Exceptions will be allowed for specialised fields such as astronomy, navigation, and scientific research, subject to prior government approval.

The Department of Consumer Affairs is collaborating with the National Physical Laboratory and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to develop a robust time generation and dissemination mechanism. Public stakeholders have been invited to submit comments and suggestions on the draft rules by 14 February. *—PTI*

FOR TECH-SAVVY GEN

Tradition meets tech in AI astrology

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

PHOTO: X

In an exciting convergence of technology and tradition, AI is reshaping the astrology landscape in India, enabling quick access to personalised insights, and appealing to a tech-savvy generation keen to explore their destinies through innovative digital platforms.

Industry experts foresee a future in which AI complements rather than replaces human knowledge and expertise. This intriguing fusion is not just a passing trend, it's reshaping how millions of people in India engage with the stars and their destinies.

AI-powered astrology apps offer a user-friendly interface, making it easy for users to interact and gain helpful insights and have various additional features like daily predictions, compatibility reports, and personalised advice, he added.

Astrosage's AI feature has answered over 25 million queries since its 2024 launch, reflecting a positive user response, Pandey said.

Users appreciate the accuracy and speed of the insights, often noting that the readings feel tailored to their needs and help them focus on solutions instead of problems, he said.

At the heart of this transformation lies sophisticated technology. Large Language Models (LLMs) and machine learning algorithms are aiding the processing of astrological data.

Feedback from users paints a picture of delight and curiosity. Many users said the insights they receive are remarkably tailored to their lives, enhancing their overall experience with astrology.

Practitioners need to ensure data privacy and avoid over-reliance on technology for life-altering decisions. Transparency about how predictions are generated will be crucial in maintaining user trust as this cosmic relationship evolves. *—PTI*

JK Cement to acquire 60% stake in Saifco Cements

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

PHOTO: X

JK Cement, one of the leading cement producers, has said it will acquire a 60 per cent stake of Saifco Cements in a deal through which it will enter into the Jammu & Kashmir market.

The JK Group firm will acquire a 60 per cent stake in Saifco Cements, which has an integrated manufacturing unit at Khunmoh in Srinagar, at a valuation of Rs 174 crore, according to a joint statement.

Saifco's integrated manufacturing unit in Srinagar is spread across 54 acres of land and has a clinker capacity of 0.26 MTPA and grinding capacity of 0.42 MTPA.

Besides, it has captive limestone reserves spread over 144.25 hectares with a total minable reserve of 129 million tonnes.

"The acquisition will help the company expand its footprint into the state of Jammu and Kashmir Region," it said.

JK Cement has a manufacturing capacity of 24.2 MTPA (million tonnes per annum) having a strong presence in markets such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. Its turnover for FY24 was at Rs 86.30 crore.

For the financial year ended March 2024, JK Cement's consolidated revenue was Rs 11,701.06 crore. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

My country has given me back: Sreejesh

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Playing down his enormous contribution to Indian hockey, Padma Bhushan PR Sreejesh has concluded that the country has given him more than what he has done for the sport, reflecting the legendary goalkeeper's modesty and humility. From first taking up the sport with the motive of getting grace marks in board exams to becoming only the second hockey player to be honored with the Padma Bhushan after Major Dhyan Chand, Sreejesh has come a long way. "I got a call from the sports ministry in the morning but was waiting for the official announcement till evening. All this time everything was going on in my mind like a flashback. I was watching a Hockey India League match in Rourkela—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Djokovic shares his MRI scan for 'sports injury experts'

PARIS, 26 JAN

Novak Djokovic cleared the picture once and for all regarding his hamstring injury, he played through the Australian Open quarter-final and semi-finals and eventually had to retire in the latter against Alexander Zverev. Since Djokovic had lost the first set before he had to withdraw, obviously some doubters booed him out of the arena alleging it was an excuse or him faking it but Djokovic decided to put his MRI scan results on social media to clear the picture literally, once and for all."Thought I'd leave this here for all the sports injury "experts" out there," Djokovic wrote on X (previously Twitter) while sharing the picture which suggested a tear in his left hamstring. —*AP*

Chawrasia top Indian at 31st in Philippine Open

MANILA, 26 JAN

The seasoned SSP Chawrasia signed off as the top Indian golfer, securing a Tied-31st place at the Smart Infinity Philippine Open on the Asian Tour here on Sunday. Chawrasia, a multiple-time winner on the DP World Tour, posted a final-round score of one-under 69 despite a bogey on the last hole. He ended the four-day event with a total of two-under 268. Of the other two Indians, who cut, Ajeetesh Sandhu (72) was T-40 and Rashid Khan (70) was T-43. Julien Sale of France bogeyed his final hole in a round of 65 while setting the clubhouse target of 11-under. His nearest rivals, Sadom (67) and Tomoya Ikemura (68) birdied the final hole —*PTI*

Saim all but ruled out of Champions Trophy

KARACHI, 26 JAN

PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi all but ruled out young opener Saim Ayub from the ICC Champions Trophy tournament due to an ankle injury for which he is taking treatment in London. Saim had fractured his ankle on the first day of the second Test against South Africa earlier this month in Capetown. Naqvi told reporters that no risk would be taken with Saim's future and he was personally monitoring his rehabilitation progress. "I am in touch with his doctors daily and his ankle plaster will come off in the next few days," Naqvi said. "But it will take time for his complete recovery and we are not going to risk his future career just for the Champions Trophy. He is our asset and we fully fit whatever time is required.—*PTI*

Gukesh beats Harikrishna, joins lead with Praggu

It was Gukesh's 3rd victory that put him on course for his maiden title

WIJK AAN ZEE, 26 JAN

World Champion D Gukesh grabbed the joint lead at Tata Steel masters, outplaying his world championship second P Harikrishna in the seventh round here.

It was Gukesh's 3rd victory that put him on course for his maiden title here as he now shares the lead with fellow Indian R Praggnanandhaa and Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan on five points.

Praggnanandhaa could not break the defenses of Jorden van Foreest while Anish Giri drew his sixth game on the trot with Abdusattorov.

Meanwhile, local hopeful Max Warmerdam added to the woes of Arjun Erigaisi by handing the Indian his fourth defeat in the tournament.

Having started the tournament on 2801 as the second seed just behind Fabiano Caruana of the United States this has been a real letdown by the Indian who has lost about 28 rating points and has slipped to the sixth spot in live ratings.

Vladimir Fedoseev to reckoning for top honors at the expense of Vincent Keymer of Germany. The Russian-turned-Slovenian has 4.5 points and holds the fourth spot just ahead of former compatriot Alexey Sarana who now plays for Serbia.

Harikrishna on 3.5 points is sharing the sixth spot with Caruana, and Wei Yi. Mendonca has two points, a half more than Arjun and they are in the last two spots in the 14-player 13-round tournament.

Gukesh faced the French defense by Harikrishna, an opening he had a deep look into during the World Championship match against Chinese Ding Liren.

D Gukesh got the win over Pentala Harikrishna at the Tata Steel Chess 2025 PHOTO: X

The Advance variation provided a certain volatility to the position and Gukesh was much better in creating problems for Harikrishna. In the end, tied down black's pieces and marched with his king for a famous victory.

Praggnanandhaa found some early tactics as black against Forrest but proved only enough to guarantee a level opposite colored Bishops endgame while Abdusattorov had a balanced position right from the word go against Anish Giri.

Nguyen Thai Dai Van of Czech Republic and Dutchman Erwin L'ami share the lead in this section on five points each. Bok and Miaoyi Lu have 4.5 while Vaishali on four points shares the fifth spot.

Results:

D Gukesh (Ind, 5) beat P Harikrishna (3.5); Wei Yi (Chn, 3.5) drew with Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 1.5); Max Warmerdam (Ned, 3.5) beat Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 1.5); Fabiano Caruana (USA, 3.5) beat Alexey Sarana (Srb, 3.5); Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 2.5) drew with R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 5); Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 4.5) beat Vincent Keymer (Ger, 3); Anish Giri (Ned, 3) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 5);

Challengers: Frederik Svane (Ger, 3.5) beat Irina Bulmaga (Rom, 1); R Vaishali (Ind, 4) drew with Benjamin Bok (Ned, 4); Nogerbek Kazybek (Kaz, 4) drew with Arthur Pijpers (Ned, 2.5); Miaoyi Lu (Chn, 4.5) beat Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 1.5); Faustino Oro (Arg, 2.5) lost to Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 5); Erwin L'Ami (Ned, 5) drew with Aydin Suleymanli (Aze, 3); Ediz Gurel (Tur, 3.5). beat Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 3). —*PTI*

NATIONAL RECORD

Jyothi Yarraji clinches 60m hurdles gold

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Reigning Asian champion Jyothi Yarraji clinched gold in her first race of the season, that too with a national record, winning the 60m hurdles event by clocking 8.04 seconds at the Elite Indoor Meeting in Nantes, France.

The 25-year-old Yarraji broke her own earlier national record of 8.12 seconds twice in a matter of few hours on Saturday.

She first clocked 8.07 seconds in the heats and then bettered her time in the final at the Stadium Pierre-Quinon in the World Athletics Indoor Tour bronze-level meet.

Her timing is, however, still short of the qualifying mark of 7.94 seconds for the World Indoor Championships to be held in Nanjing, China in March.Yarraji, who was recently conferred with the Arjuna Award, won 60m gold in the Asian Indoor Championships in 2024 with a time of 8.12 seconds in Tehran, Iran.

She also holds the national outdoor 100m hurdles record of 12.78 seconds. She is the reigning 100m hurdles Asian champion and won a silver medal in the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023 with a time of 12.91 seconds.

Meanwhile, in the men's 60m hurdles event, Tejas Shirse won a bronze with a time of 7.68 seconds. —*PTI*

Maharashtra thumped Baroda by 439-runs PHOTO: PTI

RANJI TROPHY: MAHARASHTRA CRUSH BARODA BY 439 RUNS

Seamers Mukesh Choudhary and Rajneesh Gurbani struck lethal blows as Maharashtra thumped Baroda by a whopping 439-run margin in a Group A league match, a result that kept defending champions Mumbai alive for the knock-out stage of Ranji Trophy, here Sunday.Trying to save the game and get a point in the bargain was Baroda's primary objective on the final day as chasing 617 was simply out of the question but they failed miserably and were all out for just 177 in 36 overs.Former CSK left-arm seamer Mukesh took 5 for 76 while Gurbani, who has switched first-class side from Vidarbha to Maharashtra had 3 for 54 to show for his efforts. Jammu and Kashmir are on top of group A with 29 points from six games followed by Baroda, who are on 27 points from an equal number of matches. Mumbai remained on 22 from six games after their defeat to J&K on Saturday. However, Ruturaj Gaikwad's Maharashtra has created an opening for the 42-time champions as Baroda will now have to at least get a first-innings lead against Jammu and Kashmir in their final game. —PTI

U19 WORLD CUP

Vaishnavi & Trisha help India seal SF spot

KUALA LUMPUR, 26 JAN

Left-arm spinner Vaishnavi Sharma picked three wickets in an incredible spell while G Trisha smashed a superb 40 as India continued its unbeaten run to storm into the semi-finals of the 2025 ICC U19 Women's T20 World Cup with a commanding eight-wicket win over Bangladesh at the Bayuemas Oval on Sunday.

Rain in Kuala Lumpur threatened to turn the game into a washout for the second time in the day after the Sri Lanka-Scotland clash was abandoned due to the same reasons. But the weather gods showed mercy and ensured a full match was available to play for India and Bangladesh.

Pushing Bangladesh into batting first, defending champions India managed to restrict them to 64/8 in 20 overs, thanks to Vaishnavi picking an effective 3-15, while Trisha, Shabnam Shakil, and Joshitha VJ each chipped in with a wicket.

For Bangladesh, only captain Sumaiya Akter (21 not out) and Jannatul Maoua (14) were the only batters to get into double figures.

Vaishnavi Sharma celebrates with team PHOTO: PTI

In reply, thanks to Trisha's quickfire 40 off 31 balls, laced with eight boundaries, India's chase became a walk in the park and was completed in just 7.1 overs.

India had a brilliant start to the game as Shabnam, Joshitha, and Vaishnavi along with fielders ensured Bangladesh were left at 23/5 by the end of the tenth over.

Though Sumaiya and Jannatul stitched a 31-run partnership for the sixth wicket, Vaishnavi made a crucial impact by dismissing the latter and Sadia Akter in the 17th over, as Bangladesh eventually managed to reach 64/8 at the end of their 20 overs.—*PTI*

Dercksen wins ICC Cricketer of the Year

Promising South Africa star Annerie Dercksen has been named the ICC Emerging Women's Cricketer of the Year for 2024, beating a tough field to win the prestigious honor. Dercksen wore the green and golds for the first-ever time in January 2023 during the T20I triangular series featuring India and West Indies and has never looked back. —*PTI*

Pakistan in trouble at 76-4 against WI

MULTAN, 26 JAN

West Indies stayed in the hunt for its first test win in Pakistan in 35 years after its batters came good on a turning wicket to set up a tricky target of 254 runs in the second test on Sunday.

Pakistan's top-order stuttered for the second successive time on its own engineered spin wicket and limped to 76-4 at stumps on Day 2.Saud Shakeel was not out on 13 and night-watchman Kashif Ali was unbeaten on 1 with Pakistan still needing a further 178 runs for an increasingly improbable victory on a turning pitch. West Indies lost the first test by 127 runs in three days. Pakistan 154 and 76 for 4 (Babar 31, Ghulam 19, Sinclair 2-41). —*PTI*

Sindoor-Simran win above 35 women's doubles title

GREATER NOIDA, 26 JAN

Second seeds Sindoor Mittal and Simran Bangera stunned top seeds Prachi Jain Chander and Sakshi Aggarwal to lift the above 35 Women's doubles title at the 4th IPA Pickleball Nationals at Bennett University in Greater Noida.

Mittal and Bangera, who had reached the finals with a massive 15-2 win against Vandana Bhandari and Kirty Harit, faced Chander and Aggarwal, who beat third seeds P Wadhwa and Aditi Joshi 15-6 in the first semifinal.

While Mittal and Bangera looked very confident in the first game to win it 11-8, the Delhi girls came back stronger to take a 3-8 lead in the second game but the Mumbai ladies turned the tables and won the next eight points to win the game 11-8 and bag the title.

PHOTO: PTI

Bhandari and Harit then beat Joshi and Wadhwa 15-8 to win bronze.

Eighth seeds Kishan and Krish Patel stunned the second-seeded pair of Niraj Jain and Sohel Makani to win the 35+ men's doubles title.

Having won the first game 11-4, the men from Gujarat kept up their momentum and won the second 11-5, to cruise to the title. —*PTI*

Mbappé scores first hat trick for Real Madrid as Atletico draws

BARCELONA, 26 JAN

Kylian Mbappé tucked the ball under his shirt as he raised both hands to return the applause to the Real Madrid fans who savored his first hat trick for his new club.

The France star had just led a 3-0 victory at struggling Valladolid that extended Madrid's lead in La Liga on Saturday. Gone was the inconsistent play and missed penalties from Mbappé during his first months with Madrid following his move from Paris Saint-Germain. The France captain has started pouring in goals with back-to-back multi-goal games and has Madrid in pole position with Atletico Madrid and Barcelona stalled. "I'm very happy for the hat trick but even happier for the win," Mbappé said in fluent Spanish. "It was very important to win after Atletico's result because that gave us a bit more pressure to take advantage of it." Madrid's fourth straight triumph in the league combined with Atletico Madrid's 1-1 draw with Villarreal let Carlo Ancelotti's side open a four-point gap over its city rival. Barcelona was in third place at 10 points back before hosting Valencia on Sunday. —*PTI*

Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring his side's goal

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Siniakova, Townsend clinch doubles title

MELBOURNE, 26 JAN

Taylor Townsend of the United States returned to the court on which her career first took flight, teaming with Katerina Siniakova to beat Hsieh Su-Wei and Jelena Ostapenko 6-2, 6-7 (4), 6-3 in the women's doubles final Sunday at the Australian Open.

"This is super-special to me," Townsend said. "The last time I played on this court I was 15 and in 2012 I won the juniors here and that was the kick-start.

"Honestly, being here is so special to me because this tournament was the beginning of me being able to live out my dream." Top-seeded Townsend and Siniakova of the Czech Republic led 6-2, 5-3 and served for the match for the first time at 5-4 in the second set. But third-seeded Hsieh and Ostapenko rallied to take the second set in a tie-break and to hold an early break in the third.

Taylor Townsend Katerina Siniakova with trophy PHOTO: X

Taylor and Siniakova were able to fall back on proven teamwork on crucial points. This was their third Grand Slam together: they won Wimbledon last year and reached the semifinals of the US Open. They were also able to exploit a hint of weakness on Hsieh's serve with Ostapenko at the net, breaking her four times in the match including in the ninth game of the final set. Siniakova then served out the match, with Townsend providing the finishing touch at the net. —*PTI*

ICC is an event management company: Ian Chappell

NEW DELHI, 26 JAN

Describing the ICC as an "event management company", former Australia captain Ian Chappell has observed that the financially stronger boards are getting their way in producing a self-serving schedule while harming the interest of Test cricket.

Chappell also felt that a viable two-tier system for Test cricket should have been in place by now but added that other pressing matters need urgent attention to keep the game's traditional format relevant.

"On the subject of a two-tier Test system, former West Indies pace-bowling champion Michael Holding noted: 'For all its faults, at least FIFA runs soccer. The ICC must run cricket'," Chappell wrote in his column for 'ESPNcricinfo'.

"Therein lies a perplexing problem. The ICC doesn't run cricket, and unless there's a major change of heart, the financially desirable nations will continue to have a huge say in producing a self-serving schedule."

Chappell agreed that the game's financial engine India's influence is proportional to their contribution. —*PTI*